

The
Orchid
paintings of
**Elle & Lydie
Blumhardt**
and **Claire Scott**



by Ian St George and Eric Scanlen

Cover: *Drymoanthus adversus* by Lydia Blumhardt.

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Introduction

The two Blumhardt sisters and their lifelong friend, Claire Scott painted life sized pictures of New Zealand native plants over 100 years ago. Their paintings were botanically accurate and may have been meant for publication but only a few have made it to Reed's *Te Rongoa Māori*¹ and the New Zealand Native Orchid Group's Journals.² Brooker, Cambie and Cooper's *New Zealand medicinal plants* contains illustrations by Eleonore Blumhardt, though the introduction acknowledges Lydia Blumhardt (plates of *Planchonella novo-zelandica* and *Dysoxylum spectabile* are clearly signed "EB").³

Their paintings are held in the Auckland War Memorial Museum Pictorial Collection. There are three albums and a number of loose sheets of watercolours of native plant studies, many of them of orchids.

In one album is the inscription, "Painted by Miss Lydia Blumhardt Kamo c.1906-1915, presented by M.C.S. 1 June 1971." A card inside reads "Miss Claire Scott, 30 Beckenham Ave, Royal Oak presented three albums of watercolour sketches of N.Z. plants & 80 specimens of dried ferns." In another album is written "Painted by Miss Claire Scott, Whangarei, c.1909-1915, presented by M.C.S. 1 June 1971." It contains watercolours and monochrome photographs of plants, some of the latter hand-coloured; thirteen watercolours and seven photographs are of native orchids.

A third album contains watercolour sketches by Eleonore Blumhardt, several of them orchids. According to her niece, Dame Doreen Blumhardt, Eleonore personally presented a suite of her native plant paintings to the Auckland Institute and Museum in the 1960s or earlier.

There is a fourth album of nature studies by Eleonore Blumhardt in the National Library in Wellington. It contains no images of orchids.

Eleonore ("Elle") Blumhardt 1875–1968 was born in southern Germany at Bad Boll (the spa at Boll), the second child of twelve to Nathanael & Christiane Amalie née Bräuninger. She emigrated thence to New Zealand in 1895 with her father and four siblings, to Three Mile Bush Road, Kamo where they took up dairy farming. Their original house is still standing. Elle, as she was known, never married but continued a family tradition in faith healing as a registered practitioner of Christian Science in later life. She lived in Christchurch for some years in the 1930s and 40s and had a holiday bach at Arthur's Pass. Her life sized painting of native plants started in 1905 at the family home in Kamo but she did some of her best work at Cross St, Whangarei with sister Lydia and Claire Scott, all spinsters.

Her paintings of South Island species would no doubt have been done at the Arthur's Pass bach where she had ready access to the alpine species she depicted so well.

Lydia (“Lydie”) Blumhardt 1883–1967 was born at Bad Boll, the ninth child of Nathanael and Christiane. Nathanael returned to Bad Boll and brought his wife, Lydia and the rest of his family back to Three Mile Bush Rd, Kamo in 1897. In 1915, Lydia moved to Whangarei with Claire Scott and elder sister Eleonore.

Their niece was the late potter, Dame Doreen Blumhardt. Their great-nephew is orchidologist Eric Scanlen.

Claire Scott c.1892–c.1978 evidently flatted as a teenager with Lydia and Eleonore at Cross St, Whangarei where they all spent some time painting native plants among other things. At some time later Claire and Lydia moved to Epsom, Auckland where Claire was employed hand colouring black and white photographic prints.

The three young women exhibited their work at the Whangarei Show in 1908⁴ and attended art classes at the Whangarei Technical and Manual Training School where they won prizes 1910–1913.^{5,6,7}

They must have painted together, for several of the illustrations are clearly of the same plant, painted by each of them from a slightly different angle.



Left to right in January 1956: Lydie, Elle and Claire

The orchids

Their orchids are skilful artistic sketches, often on dark paper, with nice light and clean colour and line—not scientifically detailed (some are mis-named), but accurate and pleasing. They are orchids of Northland, plants of their own collecting.

When the three young women were painting, TF Cheeseman was the national authority on native plants, his *Manual of the NZ Flora* having been published in 1906, the second edition in 1920. Harry Carse 1857–1930, HB Matthews 1861–1934 and his father RH Matthews 1835–1912 were his Northland collectors and collaborators, but we know of no contact by the three women with any of these experts, nor with other botanical artists.

Some of their paintings are presented, more or less in alphabetical order of the current scientific names, in the following pages.

Sources

McLeod, Marion, *Doreen Blumhardt, Teacher & Potter* Daphne Brasell Assoc. Press, Wellington 1991.

Scanlen, Marie. Blumhardt family tree, unpublished.

There are Brian Brake photographs of Eleonore Blumhardt with her niece, Dame Doreen Blumhardt, in the Te Papa picture library,⁸ and there is also a range of handiwork samplers by Eleonore Blumhardt in the Te Papa collections.

There are papers in the National Library from the Blumhardt family. The collection comprises a holograph journal kept by Eleanore (1901–1902) in English and German; a book, “Natural history illustrations” by EB at Whangarei 1906 and other documents.⁹

There is writing by Eleonore Blumhardt in 1927–8 issues of *Christian Science Sentinel*.

References

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9. Alexander Turnbull Library. MS-Papers-10899 and MS-Papers-9703-040.



Eleonore Blumhardt.
Caladenia sp.



Eleonore Blumhardt. *Caladenia lyallii*.



Eleonore Blumhardt.

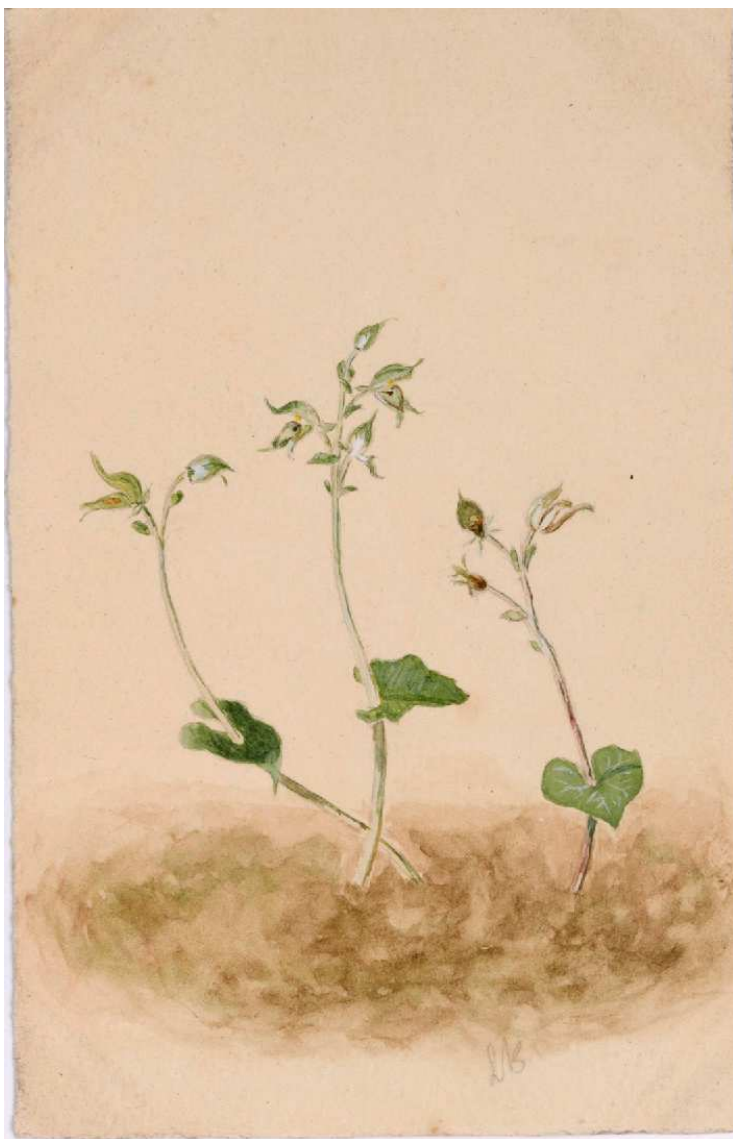
▲ *Corybas oblongus*, *Drymoanthus adversus*,
Chiloglottis cornuta.

▼ *Cyrtostylis oblonga*, *Caladenia* sp.





Eleonore Blumhardt. *Waireia stenopetala*.



Lydia Blumhardt. *Acianthus sinclairii*.

Lydia Blumhardt.
Caladenia minor
& *Caladenia* sp.





Lydia Blumhardt. *Corybas cheesemanii*.



Lydia Blumhardt. *Corybas oblongus*.



Lydia Blumhardt. *Chiloglottis cornuta*.



Lydia Blumhardt. *Cyrtostylis oblonga*.



Lydia Blumhardt. *Drymoanthus adversus*.



Lydia Blumhardt. *Dendrobium cunninghamii*.



Lydia Blumhardt. *Earina autumnalis*.



Lydia Blumhardt. *Earina mucronata*.



Lydia Blumhardt. *Microtis* sp.



Lydia Blumhardt. *Pterostylis alobula* & *P. trullifolia*.



Lydia Blumhardt. *Pterostylis banksii*.



Lydia Blumhardt. *Thelymitra* spp.



Claire Scott. *Chiloglottis cornuta*.



Claire Scott. *Dendrobium cunninghamii*.



Claire Scott. *Pterostylis banksii*.



Claire Scott.
Earina mucronata.



Claire Scott.
Pterostylis banksii.



Claire Scott. *Acianthus sinclairii*



Claire Scott. *Caladenia minor*.



Claire Scott. *Drymoanthus adversus*.



Claire Scott. *Earina autumnalis*.



Claire Scott. *Microtis* sp.

Claire Scott.
Pterostylis alobula
& *P. trullifolia*.





Claire Scott. *Pterostylis* sp.



Claire Scott. *Thelymitra* sp.



Claire Scott. *Thelymitra* sp.



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